

How to Employ Narration and Dramatization

From *Structuring Your Novel*, Meredith and Fitzgerald, ch. 8

Narration is rapidly covering, in relatively few words, of a period of time, with a suggestion of what happened during that time, and with an implication of unity. This is also termed *summary*.

Dramatization is any part of a novel where characters are *moving* or *doing* something – **action** – or *saying* something – **dialogue**. Such portions are called *scenes*. You dramatize in scenes so that the reader can identify and participate vicariously with the protagonist and other characters.

Avoiding Faulty Writing: Sound Techniques for Choosing Narration or Dramatization

Many beginning novelists go wrong by dramatizing passages that should be narrated, and narrating passages that should be dramatized. Here are some principles to help you make the right choice.

When you want to...	Then employ...
Bridge time and events with a minimum of words when, during the time period covered, nothing interesting or exciting happens	Narration
Make dramatized material move faster	Narration (convert scene to narration)
Characterize	Narration (ch. 9) Dramatization (ch. 9 and “small scenes,” below)
Make an event or series of events more believable	Narration
Transport the reader into the past (flashback, backstory)	Narration (ch. 13)
Dramatize periods where something interesting, important, or exciting is happening	Dramatization
Dramatize in <u>big scenes</u> where opposing forces meet: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exploit the conflict inherent in the meeting – the opponents must want to eliminate, overcome, subdue, or pacify the opposing force• Suggest the result of the meeting:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Somebody wins, loses, or concedes a point○ Someone is forced to make a decision○ Someone is made to realize something about himself or another character he didn’t know before○ Someone is made to understand something about the complication that incited the big scene• Use the result of the meeting to set up the transition to the next scene or a scene later in the novel• Big scenes should have a beginning, middle, and end	Dramatization: Three types of big scenes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Action alone• Action and dialogue• Dialogue alone
Characterize, dramatize in <u>small scenes</u>	Dramatization (ch. 9)

When you want to...	Then employ...
Provide exposition or backstory, dramatize in <u>small scenes</u>	Dramatization
Express a philosophy or express theme Indicate where the real story is located > dramatize in <u>small scenes</u> Advance the story (conflict not necessary)	Dramatization